



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

March 15, 2011

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
Executive Office Building
101 Monroe Street
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Leggett:

Recently it was brought to the attention of the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) by one of its members that active and inactive natural gas-fed street lights are present in some mid-County neighborhoods. The MCCAB is concerned that these lights may present a public safety concern and request that an appropriate County agency further investigate this issue and report back to the MCCAB and/or the public on its findings with suggestions for any needed safety improvements.

Some gas street lights were installed on the County rights of way in some subdivisions in Montgomery County over the past century including subdivisions in the mid-County area. These lights are connected directly to the gas main lines and are not metered. Persons who have operating gas lights on the County right-of-way on their property are/were billed a surcharge on their gas bill. In the 1970s and subsequently, that surcharge increased substantially. As the County urbanized, electric street lights have been installed in many communities, including in those already having gas street lights, making the gas street lights primarily ornamental, i.e., the utility of gas street lights for lighting purposes became unnecessary.

Many previously installed gas street lights are no longer in service: they have been shut-off at a valve in the light pole, but are still under full gas pressure. Some gas lights have been removed, but the gas lines are sealed near where the pole had been. One person in our MCCAB group observed that those capped, pressurized gas lines are quite shallow, approximately six to twenty four inches below ground. That is shallow enough to be a surprise hazard for those planting bushes or trees in front yards.

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We would like to know what were the requirements for installing gas street lights in Montgomery County and how have these requirements changed in the last 100 years? Who, if anyone, has the right to require the unused gas street lights lines to be sealed off at the gas main line?

In view of property ownership turnover, are there actions the Montgomery County Government can take to improve owners' awareness of "orphan" gas lines? Thank you in advance for looking into these questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Blaine Charak", is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

L. Blaine Charak
Chair